

OV proposes 4-day in-school week

COVID guidelines, however, make feeding students tough

BRANDON — Otter Valley Union students in grades 7-12 may have the option of going into the school four days a week starting May 3. The question, however, is how to feed them and maintain a safe distance while eating.

Rutland Northeast Superintendent Jeanne Collins continues to take a cautious approach to ex-

panding in-person learning at OV, but there are pandemic-related logistical hurdles. As vaccinations continue to increase, Gov. Phil Scott has eased the social distancing requirements in the classroom for students from 6 feet to 3 feet, but the distance apart during meals remains at 6 feet. Not only must facemasks must be removed in order to eat, but gatherings of 50 people or more in one indoor area is considered dangerous because it creates an environment more in-



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clined to spread the coronavirus.

Currently, OV operates on a hybrid model where students alternate in groups going for two days of in-person instruction at the school and three days of remote learning from home.

"It would double the kids in the building from 200 on the two-day system to nearly 400 kids," she said. "And the cafeterias were already full on the two-day schedule."

Collins said about 30% of families are still fully remote at OV, and not many would switch to in-person given the opportunity.

The district's elementary schools have been operating on a four-day in-person week with

Wednesdays being remote days since October 2020. Collins said given the number of remote students who would not return to in-person learning, that schedule will remain in place through the end of the current school year.

"We have at least one or more fully remote students in every class who don't want to return to in-person this year," she said. "Plus, we still could have periodic closures for positive cases."

Additionally, the district-wide remote Wednesday is a teacher-planning day and crucial to continuing to serve those fully remote students, she said.

"Teaching remote students is very different than teaching stu-

dents in person," Collins said. "Wednesdays are really necessary for planning to occur."

As for feeding more students inside OV, Collins said they can't start serving lunch at 8:30 a.m. to accommodate the number of cafeteria blocks needed, nor can they serve lunch in the classrooms, which are set up for the three-foot distancing guideline.

"We have to figure out a creative, realistic solution," she said. "It may entail ordering tents and tables and chairs. So the high school is still on a little bit of shaky ground (regarding more in-person instruction)... we have to feed the kids coming into the school."